

THREE COUNT

**Professional Wrestling Newsletter
by Alex Marvez**

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Tragedy strikes Von Erich family again

Chris Von Erich, the youngest member of wrestling's Von Erich clan, committed suicide Sept. 12 in Tyler, Texas, becoming the fourth of six sons **Fritz Von Erich** has lost.

Von Erich, 21, died of an apparent self-inflicted gun shot wound, and left a suicide note. He was the youngest of the five sons of Fritz Von Erich to enter the wrestling business, entering the sport in 1989. Because of his size (5-5, 165) and the lack of name recognition the Von Erichs now have in professional wrestling, he was not promoted very hard by Jeff Jarret's United States Wrestling Association in Dallas. Most reports say Von Erich was dismayed because his chronic asthma problem was getting worse and his future in the sport appeared dim.

The Von Erichs were the most popular wrestling family in the country during the early 1980's. Promoting out of the Texas area as World Class Championship Wrestling, the combination of **David, Kevin and Kerry** (Texas Tornado) **Von Erich** vying for the National Wrestling Alliance title spelled big box-office success for Fritz, the owner of the promotion. David, who wrestled in 1981 and '82 in Florida with **Dory Funk Jr.** as his tag-team partner, was supposed to defeat **Ric Flair** for the NWA title in early 1984.

But tragedy struck on a tour of Japan, when David was found dead in his hotel room at the age of 25 on January 31, 1984. Most newspapers reported David died of a stomach ailment, but that was a cover-up. David actually died of a drug overdose, having mixed a pain killer with alcohol. The real tragedy, though, didn't begin until a few months afterward. That's when Fritz began using David's death as a selling point for his promotion. The price of David Von Erich souvenirs, which were in high demand by the large throng of adolescent girls who followed wrestling, was raised to double and triple the original price. Fritz's biggest success was the first annual David Von Erich memorial show, which drew about 43,000 fans (32,123 paid) in an era before large quantities of wrestling on cable television. On the show, Kerry Von Erich pinned Flair for the NWA title.

Things quickly went downhill after Kerry dropped the title back to Flair three weeks later. Crowds were still strong until 1986, but never reached the levels they once were. **Mike Von Erich**, the second-youngest in the family, contracted toxic shock syndrome and almost died. Mike, who was only an average wrestler but promoted as much more, survived the ordeal, but suffered some brain damage. After being forced back into wrestling, Mike was not the same. He was arrested several times on various drug charges in 1987, and committed suicide later that year.

Kerry was in a motorcycle accident in 1986, and it was believed his career would be over. However, Fritz continued to push his son's comeback, even though part of Kerry's foot had to be amputated after the accident. By the time Kerry returned to a full-time schedule in 1988, crowds in WCCW had dwindled from 17,500 weekly to 200. Fritz then had to sell the promotion to Jarret in 1988.

Kevin Von Erich is still wrestling, but has not been a major name in the sport in years. Fritz's first son, **Jack Jr.**, died of electrocution when he was 6.

LETTERS

Dear Alex:

1. Where will **The Ultimate Warrior** wrestle after the WWF?

2. Why will **Brian Pillman** become a bad guy?

-- **Joseph Sena, Tallahassee, FL**

AM: The Warrior's status is still unknown, but don't expect him to go to any other wrestling federation except the WWF. After the WWF's 90-day suspension of The Warrior ends, we should know more. Plans for Pillman to turn bad were scrapped even though I understand he wanted to rejuvenate his career by turning heel.

Dear Alex:

I felt the "Match Made in Hell" (**Hulk Hogan-Ultimate Warrior vs. Sergeant Slaughter-General Adnon-Colonel Mustafa**) was a joke, with no special surprises or exciting leads. After listening to **Gorilla Monsoon** rant and rave about the Warrior's "fine physical, but unstable mental condition," I expected Hogan and Warrior to maybe fight each other.

Mr. Perfect vs. Bret Hart was an excellent match. Both men put on an excellent show that kept me on the edge of my seat. It lived up to all the pre-match hype. The Legion of Doom vs. The Nasty Boys was so-so. I expected more foreign objects and more time fighting outside the ring, since the match had no disqualifications and no count outs. **IRS vs. Greg Valentine** was just what I expected -- nothing. **Virgil** defeating **Ted DiBiase** was awesome, because it was good to see a victorious Virgil after all these years. I doubt, however, he will be "Million Dollar Champ" for long.

The other matches were average, as was the wedding. The video presentation shown before the wedding was well-done, and in a way, special. Obviously, **Randy Savage** will return to seek revenge on **The Undertaker** and **Jake Roberts**. Maybe even the Mega-Powers

THREE COUNT/page 2

(Hogan-Savage) will re-unite.

Some questions:

1. Who will win in the matches between Hogan and **Ric Flair**? If Hulk wins, will Flair leave the WWF? If Flair wins, will Hogan regain the belt? Will they wrestle before **Wrestlemania VIII** and have the final showdown there?

2. Is there a showdown being planned between Hart and **Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart**? If so, who will be the victor?

3. Which two teams will be in the main event at **Survivor Series**?

4. Whatever happened to **Tama** of The Islanders?

--**Robbie Bloom, Longwood, FL**

AM: In order --

1. I expect the Hogan-Flair feud to last for a long time. I don't ever expect to see Flair actually pin Hogan, but don't think the feud will end if Hogan defeats Flair before or during **Wrestlemania VIII**. Flair will probably continue to commit dastardly deeds to keep things fresh. I believe Flair has signed a two-year deal with the WWF, and he will main event against Hogan at 'Mania.

2. No showdowns between the two are scheduled, with Hart slated against Warlord and **Berserker**, and Neidhart against IRS this fall. I don't think the WWF would ever give Neidhart such a high spot on one of their cards, let alone consider putting him "over" against Hart.

3. It is my understanding that the main-event format used last year at **Survivor Series** has been scrapped. All the villains remaining on the Survivor teams faced all the goodguys (babyfaces) in the main event, with Hogan and Warrior victorious.

4. Tama is out of wrestling, and I believe living in San Francisco.

Dear Alex:

Do radio stations in Florida pick up the Jim Ross Radio show?

-- **Tony Miller, Hollywood, FL**
(Continued on Page 3)

Results

Charlie Mattos of Nashville, Tenn., attended a World Championship Wrestling show Sept. 19 at the Municipal Auditorium. This is his view of the matches:

1. **Big Josh** and **Young Pistol "Tracey"** defeated **The Diamond Studd** and **Oz** in nine minutes. If you want a fast-paced, well-worked, hot opening match ... this wasn't it. Tracy pinned Oz with a little help from Josh. Grade: D.

2. **Richard Morton** and **Brian Pillman** wrestled to a 15-minute draw. This had pretty decent action throughout. They sort-of gave away the finish, though, when they started counting the minutes remaining with four minutes left. Grade: B

3. **Bobby Eaton** d. **Johnny B. Badd** via disqualification when **Theodore R. Long** interfered. Best match of the night, even with the cheap DQ finish. Either Badd is getting better or Eaton can carry anybody to a good match. Probably a little bit of both. Grade: B+

4. **Dustin Rhodes** d. **Terry Taylor** in 13 minutes with the bulldog headlock. Taylor was substituting for "Stunning" Steve Austin, who came to ringside with a heavily taped knee. Grade: B-

5. **The Patriots** downed **The Freebirds** in 12 minutes to retain the U.S. tag-team titles. Not much heat. Not much action. Not much of anything. Grade: D

6. **P.N. News** crushed **Tommy Rich** in 11 painfully slow minutes. Grade: F

7. **The Enforcers (Arn Anderson and Larry Zbyszko)** kept the WCW tag-team titles by going to a double countout with **Rick Steiner** and **Bill Kazmeier** in 17 minutes. Mostly stalling and comedy. Grade: C

8. **Lex Luger** retained the WCW heavyweight title by downing **Barry Windham** in nine minutes. Not bad, but not great, either. Grade: C

Comments: The crowd was about 975 in a 10,000 seat building.

THREE COUNT/page 3

I'm looking for any results and/or analysis of any live matches **Three Count** readers attend. Please send all correspondence to P.O. Box 12795, Gainesville, FL 32604-0795.

Letters (Continued from Page 2)

AM: Ross' radio show is broadcast only on WSB (750 AM) in Atlanta. The station can be picked up north of Orlando pretty clearly after sunset, as well as in 37 other states.

Three Count is a professional wrestling newsletter published four times a month. Price for subscription is \$6 for one month, \$18 for three months, \$33 for six months and \$66 for one year. Please address all subscription checks to **Three Count** and send them to P.O. Box 12795, Gainesville, Fla., 32604-0795. Please include name, age, address and phone number.

ADVERTISEMENTS

Robbie Bloom of 380 Golf Brook Circle, Longwood, FL, 32779, (407) 774-9313 is interested in obtaining any WWF magazines prior to April/May 1986. He also has a complete set of 1987 WWF Topps Trading Cards for sale or trade for the magazines.

Barry Rose of 9200 E. Bay Harbor Drive #14, Bay Harbor Island, FL, 33154, has video tape of wrestling from all around the world and old footage from just about every promotion, including Championship Wrestling from Florida. Write for more information.

Desire any wrestling memorabilia? Interested in video tape of old matches or from other parts of the country? Send your request to **Three Count** at P.O. Box 12795, Gainesville, Fla., 32604-0795.

WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

The main focus continues to be on the **Ric Flair-Hulk Hogan** and **Sid Justice-Randy Savage** vs. **Jake Roberts-The Undertaker** feuds.

Both Hogan's and Flair's interviews have been fantastic, but Savage stole the show on last week's telecasts with his interview apologizing for destroying WWF commissioner **Jim Tunney's** office in a skit from the week before. The WWF has done a good job of getting the retirement "angle" over, even if Savage has wrestled in the U.S. and Japan since losing his career match to **The Ultimate Warrior** at **Wrestlemania VII**. Fans truly believe Savage had to retire as one of the match's stipulations. Now, that gimmick will have some selling power at a future pay-per-view. On the other hand, World Championship Wrestling's retirement angle with **Brian "The Yellow Dog" Pillman** came off as really stupid. Pillman supposedly had to quit after losing in a tag-team match with **El Gigante** vs. **Arn Anderson** and **Barry Windham** in less than four minutes at **Clash of the Champions XV**. If Pillman retiring was such a big deal, why didn't WCW mention it during the rest of the Clash?

I'm curious, though, to see how well Justice does in this situation. I think the fans merely see him as a substitute for Savage, which is not good. Justice needs to establish himself on his own, not as someone doing Savage's dirty work, especially if he is to continue in main event matches.

Early reports have **Curt "Mr. Perfect" Hennig** out of action for about one year with a back injury. The WWF cannot confirm the report, but don't expect Hennig back anytime soon.

I like the **Big Bully Busick** character, even though it's way too early for him to feud with **The British Bulldog**. Busick's real name is **Nick Busick**, and he was an undercover drug-enforcement agent in South Florida during the mid-1980s. He

THREE COUNT/page 4

has wrestled as **Comrade Busick**, a Russian sympathizer. As **The Bully**, Busick was going to be a major character in **Joe Pedicino's Global Wrestling Federation**. Word has it Justice used his influence to get Busick and manager **Harvey Whippleman** (formerly **Downtown Bruno** of **United States Wrestling Association** fame) jobs in the WWF.

The complete line-up for the WWF's Oct. 3 show at the **Miami Arena** is **Sid** vs. **Roberts**, **Bret Hart** vs. **The Warlord**, **Virgil** vs. **Ted DiBiase**, **IRS** vs. a substitute (originally, it was going to be **Sid** until the **Warrior** quit/got fired), **The Bushwhackers** vs. **The Beverly Brothers**, **The Dragon (Ricky Steamboat)** vs. **The Skinner (Steve Keirn)** and **Greg Valentine** vs. **The Berserker**. The line-up for the WWF's Oct. 14 show at the **West Palm Beach Auditorium** is identical, except **IRS** will face **Jim Neidhart**.

This next item has to do indirectly with the WWF. The wrestlers and referees in Mexico are on strike, because **EMML**, the country's top promotion, wants to air its big Friday night show at **Arena Mexico** on television. **EMML** is doing this because the WWF has begun airing its show in Mexico, and will begin promoting there soon. Right now, **EMML's** business is red hot, and the group's wrestlers believe that airing the show on television will keep fans from spending money at the arena. There are already more than 10-12 cards weekly in **Mexico City**, and many more in the surrounding areas.

Tito Santana is returning to the WWF as **El Matador**, but he isn't expected to make an impact in the Mexican market. That will be left to **Conan**, a big draw in **EMML** who has been waiting to enter the WWF since last February. I also understand WWF owner **Vince McMahon** has shown interest in signing Mexican midget wrestler **Mascara Sagrita** (who is fantastic).

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

What's in a name? Well, for World Championship Wrestling, the National Wrestling Alliance moniker means a heck of a lot. To the average wrestling fan, not a thing.

WCW has regained possession of the NWA moniker from the group's seven-member board. WCW executive vice president **Jim Herd** was voted NWA president, and in his first action, stripped **Ric Flair** of his status as NWA champion and gave it to WCW kingpin **Lex Luger**.

To put this in perspective, a short history of the NWA is needed. A number of promoters from around the country banded together in the mid-1940's to form the NWA. The promoters agreed upon one world champion to defend the NWA world championship in their area on a periodic basis. A promoter could then develop feuds among the wrestlers in his area, have one wrestler stand out among all the others (usually the one with the most money-making potential) by either gaining a title or proving his superiority over the others, and then have a championship match between that challenger and the champion. Fans regarded the match as special, because the NWA champion didn't defend his title in the area often. The promoters also agreed to band together and lend each other talent should an "outlaw" promotion open in an area (a group that wasn't associated with the NWA), and trade talent.

The alliance worked all the way through the mid-1980's, but almost every promoter was caught off guard by Vince McMahon Jr.'s decision to promote the World Wrestling Federation. **Vince McMahon Sr.** owned the World Wide Wrestling Federation (the precursor to the WWF owned by his son, Vince Jr.), and often worked talent trades with NWA promoters.

As McMahon Jr. raided the NWA's top talent, the promoters divided instead of united. Many believed McMahon Jr. would run himself bankrupt. But by 1986, the WWF was regarded as the

THREE COUNT/page 5

premiere wrestling promotion. That's when the NWA began to split apart. **Bill Watts** pulled his Oklahoma territory away and began the Universal Wrestling Federation, completely separate from the NWA. **Fritz Von Erich** and his World Class Championship Wrestling promotion in Texas left as well. Eventually, the NWA name became strictly associated with Jim Crockett Promotions out of North Carolina.

Ted Turner bought Crockett Promotions in 1988, when the latter was millions of dollars in debt. Turner renamed the group "World Championship Wrestling," but the name NWA was used frequently on WCW telecasts. In fall of 1990, the owners of the NWA name wanted to receive compensation for the monicker's use. Herd was unable to agree upon a settlement, so WCW stopped using the NWA name in December of 1990.

The issue remained dormant until Flair was fired in July. At the request of **Dennis Guthrie**, Flair's attorney, four of the seven NWA members voted to keep Flair as NWA champion and not recognize Luger's reign. The NWA promoters weren't running shows at the time, but voted for the measure as a show of solidarity, a knock at WCW and, it is speculated, in the hope of running new shows with Flair as champion. Flair kept the title belt he defended as NWA and WCW champion upon leaving WCW.

When Flair joined the WWF, things got sticky. WCW officials are reportedly furious that Flair is displaying the belt on WWF telecasts, even though no reference has ever been made to Flair as a former WCW or NWA champion. By gaining control of the NWA moniker, WCW officials reportedly hope to regain possession of the belt. That may not be so easy, because Flair supposedly gained ownership in a contract settlement with Crockett Promotions.

I don't know why WCW doesn't just stop subliminally mentioning Flair on their telecasts. There never was a dispute about Luger's title reign until WCW announcer **Jim Ross** began declaring him

(Continued on Page 6)

the "undisputed world champion." WCW fans cannot forget Flair when there are constant knocks to the "Nature Boy" delivered by Ross and sidekick **Paul E. Dangerously**. Instead, WCW should be focusing on promoting Luger as the most arrogant man in the world and **Ron Simmons** as a legitimate contender. Plus, Flair appearing on WWF telecasts with the belt gives WCW some much-needed credibility.

On a side note, I was very fortunate to talk with "**Nature Boy**" **Buddy Rogers** in early August after we did a radio appearance together on WFLF (1400 AM) in Fort Lauderdale. He told me that when he was NWA world champion in the 1950s, the NWA's main promoter (**Sam Muchnick** out of St. Louis) required him to give a \$25,000 cash down payment "just in case" something happened to the title belt. Rogers, 70, was the only man to ever hold both the WWF and NWA world titles.

The other big WCW news (and not **P.N. News**) could have been a big story, but isn't. "**Stunning**" **Steve Austin** was believed to have sustained a dislocated knee cap two weeks ago in Charleston, S.C. The injury was said to have occurred in a six-man tag-team match when Austin delivered his stun gun on **Bobby Eaton**. Fortunately, Austin only missed his weekend dates, and is wrestling again.

The One Man Gang is gone from WCW after refusing to lose a match to **P.N. News**. Gang (**George Gray**) has been replaced by **Abdullah the Butcher** in the Chamber of Horrors match Oct. 27 on WCW's Halloween Havoc pay-per-view show. Yes, I know, **Cactus Jack** would have been the logical replacement for the match, but he's scheduled in a meaningless affair with **Bill Kazmeier**.

Even stranger is WCW's double standard for wrestlers refusing to do "jobs." It appears Sting, Luger and The Steiner Brothers don't have to lose unless they want to. How is a company supposed to thrive if

its top performers refuse to work? I think Herd should spend time on meaningful things like correcting this problem, instead of wasting it on getting back the NWA name.

WCW has a bevy of live dates in Florida this fall. Shows are scheduled Oct. 3 in Lakeland, Oct. 4 in Sarasota, Oct. 5 in Jacksonville and Oct. 6 in Tallahassee. Also scheduled are St. Petersburg Nov. 29, Belle Glade Nov. 30, Key West Dec. 1, Sunrise Dec. 2, West Palm Beach Dec. 3, Melbourne Dec. 5 and Jacksonville Dec. 7. For *Three Count* readers in South Carolina, WCW event coordinator **Chip Burnham** says no dates are scheduled near Spartanburg anytime soon, but he'll keep me posted.

Tidbits: **Oz** and **El Gigante** are slated to appear on a Swamp Thing episode in October. Both will be portraying the role of gods (appropriate, considering both have the wrestling ability of **Zeus**) ... **P.N. News** appeared at a rally in Charleston, W. V. encouraging kids to stay in school. More than 25,000 people were scheduled to attend, with Secretary of Education **Lamar Alexander** and several NBA players also set to appear ... The Atlanta Journal-Constitution had an article a few weeks back about how professional wrestling angles serve as precursors to real-life wrestling events. They interviewed **Dusty Rhodes**, who talked about The Super Powers gimmick with **Nikita Koloff**.

More false advertising from WCW: I was thumbing through The Florida Times-Union Sept. 19 and came across an ad for a videotape of WCW's Great American Bash pay-per-view show. Advertised as the main event was a world title match between Flair and Luger. As everyone knows, Flair was fired before the bout and Barry Windham took his place. Of course, WCW wouldn't even go through the bother of changing its advertising.

SPOTLIGHT ON... **THE INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING FEDERATION**

What: **Eddy Mansfield's** Florida-based promotion that began airing in July. Most of the wrestlers are new talent trained by Mansfield, a former wrestler in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Other wrestlers come from **Henry Raines'** Suncoast Pro Wrestling group.

Where: IWF television tapings are done at Sound Stage 23 of Universal Studios in Orlando, and Mansfield wisely takes advantage of the setting. Crowds are always rabid (having been told who the good guys and bad guys are beforehand), and the studio looks large and full. Vignettes done inside the amusement park are also very well done, with one skit involving **The Long Riders (Colt and Winchester)** that was fantastic. It put any of WCW's Desperados nonsense to shame.

When: The show was airing at 11 p.m. Fridays on Sunshine Network, but Mansfield's 13-week deal with the network expired a few weeks back. A Sunshine spokesperson said the network is trying to get Mansfield's show back on the air. I'm told Mansfield has a few outlets to syndicate his show, but none that I've gotten confirmed.

Who's hot?: The best wrestler in the group is **The Possessor ("Nasty" Ned Brady)**. He's best described as a **Cactus Jack** clone without hair and 30 pounds lighter. In the mid-1970s, he could have been a huge star. **Cliff Anderson (Cliff Sheets)** is an **Arn Anderson** clone, and a good one at that. **Mondo Clean** was a good choice as this group's world champion. He's got size (about 6-3, 260), a good delivery on interviews and a good gimmick as a deranged ancient Englishman. **Chubby M.C.** is pretty green as a wrestler, but puts **P.N. News** to shame as a rapper. The television production also deserves mention, because it is clean and very well-done.

Who's not?: The group's announcing ranges from bad-to-horrible. **Kevin Kelly** is not bad at describing a match and has a very good voice. But do you realize how stupid he and Mansfield sound when they say the IWF can sell out any building in the country (and other such myths)? **Thunder and Lightning vs. The Heartbreakers** is the group's top tag-team feud, but it just doesn't appeal to me. It's not all that bad, though. The group must break the monotony of its interviews. Almost every wrestler comes across sounding the same with obnoxious behavior and stupid threats.

Outlook: This is tough. I was very pleasantly surprised by the shows I've seen. None of the talent is all that bad, and some is surprisingly good. **Dave Meltzer** of The Wrestling Observer newsletter said he believes Mansfield has a great talent in training wrestlers. The IWF is proof. However, it's going to be tough for this group to make it with only a late-night Sunshine television spot as its main exposure. Hopefully, Mansfield can assemble a strong syndicated television package and begin running live shows throughout the state. His talent roster is deep enough to do that. But Mansfield should be given a lot of credit for even getting this promotion off the ground. Only six years ago, he was blacklisted from the sport because he exposed some of the wrestling business on a 20/20 episode.

NOTEBOOK

My sincerest apology for the delay in getting this issue out. A bunch of things happened this week that pushed production time back. I had to go to Syracuse to cover the University of Florida-Syracuse football game and we had some production problems with the computer. Plus, I've been working on a **major** story that will be the focus of my next issue (date 9/30). I've enclosed an extra page as a form of compensation. I wouldn't mind adding an extra double-sided page to each issue if I get more responses to the "Letters" and "Results" sections. I'm also planning to devote more space to full-length feature stories.

For those of you with one month subscriptions, please don't forget to resubscribe! And also, please tell your friends. The final issue of September will be sent either 10/1 or 10/2, depending on how quickly I can assemble information on my lead story. It will be worth the wait.

Suncoast Pro Wrestling is offering *Three Count* readers two free tickets to its October 26 show at the Manatee County Civic Center in Palmetto, Fla. For tickets, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Henry Raines at 5748 14 Street West, Bradenton, FL 34207. The show can be seen on WBSU in Sarasota (Channel 62) on Saturdays at 8:30 a.m. and on WTTA (Channel 38) in Tampa on Saturdays at 5:30 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. Henry is also selling a tape of three Suncoast shows for \$17.50. Write for more information.

Next issue: Yes, a major story is set to break. And since I'm the person writing it, *Three Count* readers will get a detailed report. Also, there may be some major pay-per-view news coming out of the World Wrestling Federation. The spotlight feature will be on Suncoast Pro Wrestling. And, as usual, letters and news from WCW and the other wrestling promotions.

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